

WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

COMMITTEE: SOCIAL SERVICES

DATE: MARCH 27, 2009

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: OTHERS PRESENT:

SUPERVISOR	TESSIER	REPRESENTING THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES:
	O'CONNOR	SHEILA WEAVER, COMMISSIONER
	KENNY	AMY BARTLETT, FIRST ASSISTANT COUNTY ATTORNEY
	MERLINO	HAL PAYNE, COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATIVE &
	STRAINER	FISCAL SERVICES
		JOAN SADY, CLERK OF THE BOARD

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

SUPERVISORS	SHEEHAN	KEVIN GERAGHTY, BUDGET OFFICER
	BENTLEY	SUPERVISOR TAYLOR
		SUPERVISOR THOMAS
		BUD YORK, SHERIFF
		TODD LUNT, DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES
		JOANNE COLLINS, LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

Mr. Tessier called the meeting of the Social Services Committee to order at 11:19 a.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Merlino, seconded by Mr. Kenny and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the February 27, 2009 Committee meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Sheila Weaver, Commissioner of Social Services, who distributed copies of the agenda to the Committee members; *a copy of the agenda is on file with the minutes.*

Mrs. Weaver referred to the overtime report and stated that there had been an overall decrease in overtime; however, she noted, there was an increase in overtime in the Temporary Assistance Unit, due in part to staff members on medical leave.

Pertaining to the Request for Proposal (RFP) for a Medicaid Fraud Consultant, Mrs. Weaver reported that she had not accepted the low bid, which was \$55 per hour plus an additional six hours in travel time per month; therefore, the second low bid had been accepted and a contract was being prepared by the County Attorney's Office.

Referring to Agenda Items 3 and 4, Mrs. Weaver apprised that her office had received notification that they would be receiving \$29,215 in additional funds for

Child Support Incentives as a result of a DSS settlement. Additionally, she stated, a retroactive payment for FMAP in the amount of \$539,738 for the period from October through December 2008 had been received with another \$311,160 expected for the period from January through March, 2009.

Mr. Payne stated that as a result of the stimulus package, Warren County would receive a total of \$4.1 million over nine quarters.

Moving to Agenda Item 5, Mrs. Weaver requested permission to fill the vacant position of Caseworker in the Preventive Services Unit, base salary \$34,178, Employee No. 9282, due to retirement. She stated that the position was 82% reimbursed by Federal and State dollars and she noted that each caseworker handled approximately 15-16 cases.

Responding to an inquiry from Mr. Kenny, Mrs. Weaver stated that the goal of the Preventive Services Caseworker was to prevent situations which rendered the need for foster care. Further, she said, the State mandated that each child be seen at least twice per month, at which time the caseworker inspected the home situation for signs of abuse and neglect. Court proceeding were not mandated for these abuse and neglect cases, however; she said, efforts were made to prevent the need for foster care intervention.

Mrs. Weaver cited a case in Wyoming where the life of a child might have been saved had more frequent visits been made. She noted that a visit had not been made in a six month period and the child did not survive.

A discussion ensued.

Mr. Merlino asked the effect that the stimulus money had on the DSS budget, and Mr. Payne responded that it would go into the general fund as unallocated revenue and would not be considered a budget increase for additional spending. Mr. Tessier cautioned that such funding should not be used for salaries or additional staff.

Motion was made by Mr. Strainer, seconded by Mr. O'Connor and carried unanimously to approve the request to fill the vacant position of Caseworker as outlined above, and to refer same to the Personnel Committee. *A copy of the Notice of Intent to Fill Vacant Position is on file with the minutes.*

Mrs. Weaver presented Agenda Item 6, a request to fill the vacant position of Social Welfare Examiner, base salary \$31,900, Employee No. 10005, due to retirement. Mrs. Weaver stated that the caseload had increased by 25% and she

expected additional funding for the Food Stamp Administration for two years through the stimulus package. The position was 69% Federal and State reimbursed and she noted there was no prior year increase in staff.

Motion was made by Mr. Strainer, seconded by Mr. Merlino and carried unanimously to approve the request to fill the vacant position of Social Welfare Examiner as outlined above and to refer same to the Personnel Committee. *A copy of the Notice of Intent to Fill Vacant Position is on file with the minutes. (Note: The correct base salary for the Social Welfare Examiner should be \$29,199.)*

Mrs. Weaver presented a request to fill the vacant position of Social Welfare Examiner, base salary \$31,900, Employee No. 10163, due to retirement. Mrs. Weaver stated that the caseload had increased by 40% and the position was reimbursed 50% by Federal and State dollars. She added that the Department was down two staff members and had one new staff member starting in April for which 18 to 24 months of training would be required.

Motion was made by Mr. Strainer, seconded by Mr. Merlino and carried unanimously to approve the request to fill the vacant position of Social Welfare Examiner and refer same to the Personnel Committee. *A copy of the Notice of Intent to Fill Vacant Position is on file with the minutes. (Note: The correct base salary for the Social Welfare Examiner should be \$29,199.)*

Mr. Kenny conveyed his concern with regard to the haste in which requests to fill vacant positions were approved by this Committee and forwarded to the Personnel Committee in light of the goal of achieving a zero percent budget increase. He stated that although he fully acknowledged the need to fill positions, some of which were partially funded, he asserted that this placed a burden on the Personnel Committee. Further, he stated, the Board would need to absorb many positions within the County in order to meet the goal. Mr. Strainer noted that when an individual retired, money was saved due to their accrued longevity and salary differentials. Mr. Kenny stated that it would be inevitable that Departments must increase operational efficiency with less resources (staff), and that earnest action to that end should begin immediately. Mrs. Weaver stated that she was reviewing all contracts internally in order to derive methods by which to reduce expenditures with regard to maintaining a zero budget increase in terms of salaries. She added that she had met with the Probation Department yesterday regarding the issue.

Mrs. Weaver presented Agenda Item 8, a request for permission to contract with Accu Care Home Health Services, Inc. for private duty nursing for one individual residing in Warren County, to be paid with Medicaid funds.

Motion was made by Mr. Kenny, seconded by Mr. Strainer and carried unanimously to approve the request to enter into a contract with Accu Care Home Health Services, Inc. as outlined above, and the necessary resolution was authorized for the April 17, 2009 Board meeting. *A copy of the resolution request form is on file with the minutes.*

Hal Payne, Commissioner of Administrative & Fiscal Services asked Mrs. Weaver if she had spoken to Pat Auer, Director of Health Services, regarding the use of public health nurses who have a strong presence in the community. Mrs. Weaver stated that private duty nursing was different and was provided for patients that would otherwise need to be hospitalized. She noted that there was one employee in Warren County providing this service at \$26.78 per hour. Mr. Payne noted that private duty nursing care may be more costly than the hospital stay, and Mrs. Weaver stated that according to patient rights, the patient made that decision.

Mrs. Weaver presented Agenda Item 9 which included nine requests for in-state travel as follows:

- A) Child Protective Services Response Training to be held on May 4 - 8, 2009, and May 18 - 22, 2009, in Albany, NY, at a room rate of \$50 per night and a meal cost of \$13 per day for lunch.
Employee(s) to attend: Maureen Schmidt and Nicole Pustolka
- B) CW/CPS Supervisory Core Module I Training to be held on May 27 - 28, 2009 and June 9 - 11, 2009, in Albany, NY, at a room rate of \$50 and a meal cost of \$13 per day for lunch.
Employee(s) to attend: Christian Hanchett
- C) Child Protective Services Supervisory Core Training to be held on June 23 - 25, 2009 and July 7 - 9, 2009 in Albany, NY, at a room rate of \$50 and a meal cost of \$13 per day for lunch.
Employee(s) to attend: Maureen Schmidt, Nicole Pustolka, Kim George, Julianna Pearl and Christian Hanchett.
- D) Chronic Care Training Institute to be held March 31 - April 3, 2009 in Albany, NY, at a room rate of \$55.50 per night, and a meal cost of \$13 per day for lunch.
Employee(s) to attend: Diane Perry.
- E) Executive Leadership Institute to be held on May 5 - 7, 2009 in Hamilton, NY.
Employee(s) to attend: Sheila Weaver
- F) GPS/MAPP Leader Certification Training to be held on April 21 - 24, 2009 and May 4 - 8, 2009 in Albany, NY, at a room rate of \$50 per night and a meal cost of \$13 per day for lunch.
Employee(s) to attend: Kerri Neifeld
- G) CW/CPS Common Core Training to be held on June 22 - 26, 2009, July

- 6 - 10, 2009, July 21 - 24, 2009, August 4 - 7, 2009 and August 18 - 21, 2009, in Albany, NY at a room rate of \$50 per night and a meal cost of \$13 per day for lunch.
Employee(s) to attend: Kerri Neifeld
- H) Child Protective Services Response Team Training to be held on August 31 - September 4, 2009 and September 14 - 18, 2009 in Albany, NY at a room rate of \$50 and a meal cost of \$13 per day for lunch.
Employee(s) to attend: Kerri Neifeld
- I) Child Abuse Prevention Conference to be held on April 20 - 22, 2009 in Albany, NY.
Employee(s) to attend: Diane Coughlin

Motion was made by Mr. Kenny, seconded by Mr. Merlino and carried unanimously to approve all of the in-state travel requests as outlined above. *Copies of the Authorization to Attend Meeting or Convention forms are on file with the minutes.*

Regarding the caseload in the legal unit, Mrs. Weaver requested permission to add a part-time Social Services Attorney to the current staff, which would result in a total of three legal staff members (currently at 2.5). She stated that the legal unit had been overwhelmed with a 61% increase in petitions in the past year. Further, she stated, all foster care cases now required an additional permanency hearing every six months, and cases had been lost due to the lack of time available for the necessary legal preparation. Mrs. Weaver stated that she had planned to speak with Paul Dusek, County Attorney, regarding the issue.

A discussion ensued.

Amy Bartlett, First Assistant County Attorney stated that she would speak to Mr. Dusek this week. Mr. Kenny cautioned that the creation of a new position was in violation of Warren County's hiring freeze mandate.

Mr. O'Connor stated that although he was opposed to hiring new staff, it was imperative that each request be thoroughly reviewed. Mrs. Weaver stated that she had compared the cost of increasing the current part-time para-legal staff member to full-time, versus hiring a new part-time attorney, and the findings indicated that it would cost \$3,000 more to hire the attorney whose expertise and training would make a significant difference in the outcome in case handling in the Department.

Mr. Tessier stated that the request for additional legal staff in the DSS would be tabled until a later meeting, pending discussion with the County Attorney.

Mrs. Weaver informed the Committee that a joint meeting was held on March 26, 2009 with the Sheriff and the District Attorney and a recommendation had been made to hire a part-time investigator to deal with Medicaid Fraud and increasing drug sales. The salary for this position would be paid from the Sheriff's Office Budget.

With respect to pending items, Mrs. Weaver stated that the Johnsbury outreach project would remain pending.

Regarding the methadone site, Mr. Payne stated that Whitney Young of OASIS (Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Intervention Services), and an individual from New York City would be in attendance at a meeting to be held in Warren County regarding the development of the local methadone treatment site. Mr. Payne noted there was also interest shown by Essex County.

Motion was made by Mr. Strainer, seconded by Mr. Merlino and carried unanimously that executive session be declared pursuant to Section 105 (e) of the Public Officers Law.

Executive session was declared from 11:43 a.m. to 11:46 a.m.

Committee reconvened and Mr. Tessier noted that no action was necessary pursuant to the executive session.

A discussion ensued regarding the process of filling vacant positions. Mr. Geraghty cautioned that the Committee had continued to approve the filling of vacant positions and forward same to the Personnel Committee as the unemployment rate continued to rise in Warren County. Mr. Geraghty commended Mrs. Weaver for her fiscally responsible efforts to avoid and trim expenses in the DSS, and asked her if it would be possible to do more with less staff especially in light of the numerous unfunded State mandates. He asked the Committee if it was the best procedure to forward every position request to the Personnel Committee without a full position analysis. Mr. O'Connor stated that he felt it was counter productive to pass the items on to the Personnel Committee. Mr. Tessier noted that the Personnel Committee members were not apprised of the details surrounding the vacancy, and therefore; he stated, the referral of such items placed unfair demands on the Personnel Committee.

Mr. Strainer asserted that overtime pay was more costly than a regular staff salary, and he apprised that the Child Protective Unit presented unusually challenging work content for Mrs. Weaver and her staff. He said that he agreed with the hiring freeze; however, he stated, Mrs. Weaver's growing caseloads must be addressed. Further, Mr. Strainer stated that Mrs. Weaver had always made changes when possible in the interest of cost savings. Mr. Merlino noted that Mrs.

Weaver was not adding to the total staff, but rather replacing necessary staff due to turnover.

Continuing, Mr. Kenny apprised that the Personnel Committee members should ideally serve on no other committees. He added that unapproved items are often brought back to the supervisory committee in an effort to overturn the denial. He pointed out that local companies such as Finch Paper and The Post Star had trimmed their workforce and the County was not insulated from such cost saving strategies.

Mr. Tessier noted that he was in favor of the hiring freeze whereby new positions would not be added; however, he said, such a mandate could not apply 100% of the time nor in all situations. Mr. Thomas stated that the County had provided the services for New York State programs and that implementing strategies to insure the integrity of DSS client eligibility was another important way to trim unnecessary use of funds.

Mr. Taylor conveyed his agreement with Mr. Kenny's statement that all Personnel requests should come before the Personnel Committee with a strong recommendation from the Supervisory Committee; in this case, the Social Services Committee.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Todd Lunt, Director of Human Resources who recommended that for each position opening, a period of two to three months should pass prior to the determination to fill a position. He expounded that during that period of time, the Department would continue to research and review the impact of the lower staff count. He suggested that the Department head report to back to the Committee in thirty or sixty day intervals. He stated that Department Heads may report that they had managed with the reduced staff, or alternatively that the Department could not endure without the staff placement. He said this was one strategy with which to achieve challenging budgetary goals.

Mr. Geraghty expressed his agreement for the strategy to delay hiring and that it would encourage creative thinking in terms of staffing which might include the repositioning of staff members. Alternatively, he stated, the approval of all position requests was directly prohibitive to meeting the goals for the budget.

Mrs. Weaver stated that overtime paid in the Temporary Assistance Unit was high and continually increasing due to the fact that the current staff was not fully trained, and that high turnover had continued due to high stress loads related to the work. For these reasons, she said, she could not delay the position request in the Temporary Assistance Unit; however, she said, a delay could be

implemented for the Preventive Services Caseworker position. Regarding the request to fill the vacant position in the Food Stamps Unit, Mrs. Weaver stated that the position could be delayed until May and she cautioned the Committee that overtime figures could increase. Mr. Geraghty praised Mrs. Weaver for her conscientious efforts regarding overtime.

Motion was made by Mr. Strainer, seconded by Mr. Merlino and carried unanimously to rescind the motion which approved the request to Fill the Vacant Position of Social Welfare Examiner, base salary of \$29,199, Employee No. 10005, due to retirement. Mr. Tessier stated that overtime figures as they relate to the position would be discussed further at next month's Committee meeting.

As there was no further business to come before the Social Services Committee, on motion by Mr. Strainer and seconded by Mr. Merlino, Mr. Tessier adjourned the meeting at 12:09 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Joanne Collins, Legislative Office Specialist